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SUBJECT: UNITED RUSSIA'S CONFERENCE RAISES MORE QUESTIONS  
THAN ANSWERS

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[1](#)B. ST PETERSBURG 00106

Classified By: CDA Daniel A. Russell. Reason: 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Sound bites from top Kremlin and government leaders over the past week about United Russia gave mixed signals to an already confused elite about the party's significance in the emerging "tandem" system. At the May 29 United Russia conference, PA Head Sergey Naryshkin and his Deputy, Vladislav Surkov, joined Duma Speaker Boris Gрызлов in calling a re-assessment of United Russia's election focus to an emphasis on administration and implementation. It is unclear how a party driven by the members' self-interest and opportunism can make the vision a reality or, if successful, who would be the beneficiary in the Medvedev-Putin tandem. Conventional wisdom gives Putin the greater influence today - evidenced by his comments touting his position at United Russia's helm as more significant than his appointment as Premier. Yet, some viewed Medvedev's June 2 letter against changing the media law as a signal that the new President will also assert his authority vis-a-vis the party-dominated legislature. As with so much in Russia today, we are unlikely to have a clear understanding of United Russia's role in the new constellation until at least the fall, when Medvedev's ideas are turned into legislation proposals. End summary.

#### A Party In Search of a Purpose

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[1](#)2. (SBU) On May 29, representatives from United Russia's regional branches joined with the Moscow leadership at the Presidential Administration to discuss the party's further development. After the requisite backslapping for the "electoral successes" in the parliamentary and presidential races, the party leaders took turns in explaining coming challenges for the country in general and the party specifically. PA head Naryshkin's speech focused primarily on the economic agenda, outlining four tasks for the party over the coming years: the transition to an "innovation" economy; institutional modernization; development of law enforcement and judicial systems; and the improvement of economic institutions by creating a competitive environment and overcoming monopolistic trends. None of this broke new ground for the conference delegates, since the ideas of economic liberalism inherent in Naryshkin's speech devolve from the administration's Strategy to 2020 -- Putin's blueprint for economic development that Medvedev has adopted as the centerpiece of his administration. But, Naryshkin drove home the point that the party had to adapt to the new circumstances and play a central role in implementing the government's agenda.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Gрызлов's speech on re-organizing and re-shaping United Russia followed a similar line as Naryshkin, but his comments may have been more troubling to the attendees, since he proposed changes potentially threatening not only the rank

and file, but also the regional leadership. Gryzlov challenged the party to make the transition from election victory to success in administration and management. He highlighted the "debate" among the party's various clubs, praising the unifying position of Putin as party head as providing sufficient gravity to allow a diversity of views within the membership. Moreover, he called for the development of a personnel reserve, identifying a thousand potential candidates to fill mayoral and gubernatorial posts in the coming 5-10 years -- presaging more personnel turnover and cadre rotations, primarily from the party ranks. Following Putin's criticism last fall, when the then President a